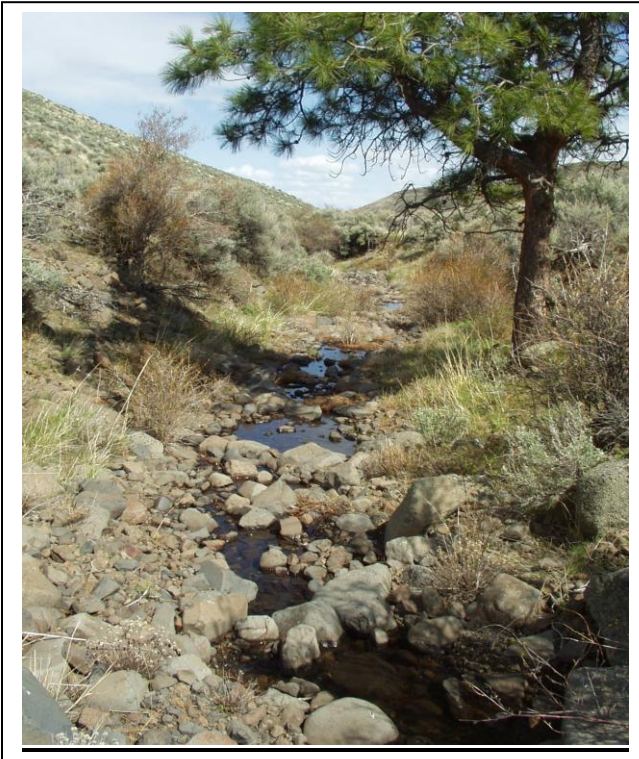




L.T. MURRAY COMPLEX WILDLIFE AREAS 2010 MANAGEMENT PLAN UPDATE

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife



Land Management Summary

This is an update to the 2006 L.T. Murray, Quilomene and Whiskey Dick Wildlife Areas Management Plan

http://wdfw.wa.gov/lands/wildlife_areas/management_plans/ providing management direction for the roughly 110,000-acre wildlife area complex located near Ellensburg, in Kittitas County, Washington. The plan identifies needs and guides activities on the area based on the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) Mission of “*Sound Stewardship of Fish and Wildlife*” and its underlying statewide goals and objectives as they apply to local conditions.

Plans are updated annually as habitat and species conditions change, as new regulations and scientific knowledge develop, as public issues and concerns evolve, and as administration of wildlife

areas change. This management plan update also includes 2007-2009 accomplishments, new issues, new land management strategies, and performance measures for 2010.

Updates/Changes

In July 2009 the Wenas Wildlife Area was separated from the L.T. Murray, Quilomene, and Whiskey Dick Wildlife Areas Complex. Cindi Confer remains the Wenas Wildlife Area Manager, and Shana Winegeart was hired as the new L.T. Murray Complex Wildlife Area Manager. The new position is funded by operation of nine wind turbines on 80 acres of the Whiskey Dick WA. The land was leased to Puget Sound Energy (PSE) in 2005 and is operated as part of the Wild Horse Wind Farm.

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HUNTING

In October 2009 WDFW began releasing pheasants in the Green Gate area (located at milepost 13 along the Vantage Highway) of the Quilomene Wildlife Area. This new site was created to provide a safer hunting environment in response to excessive and unsafe target shooting near the old Durr Road pheasant release site (Wenas Wildlife Area). A total of 540 pheasant were released over the 2009 hunting season.

The 3911 Antlerless Elk Modern Firearms Unit for depredation control hunting was established in 2003. It evolved from the original 911 Any Elk Muzzleloader damage control unit, and was contained by approximately the same boundaries. Minor boundary changes have occurred almost yearly, with the largest change being in 2008 when all the area inside and to the east of the Wild Horse Wind Project and south of the Vantage Highway was excluded. In addition, a new “true spike only” hunting restriction was put in effect during the 2009 elk season in GMUs 328, 329, and 334, which covers the majority of the Quilomene and Whiskey Dick Wildlife Areas. This change was made in attempt to improve bull recruitment.

ROAD MANAGEMENT

Road Maintenance and Abandonment Plan (RMAP): Between 2007 and 2009, WDFW improved/maintained approximately 25 miles of road, abandoned two miles, and removed five undersized or problem culverts (replacing four of them with new). The four new culverts replaced former fish passage barriers, which re-opened approximately 2.9 miles of fish habitat. The road work included installing water bars, improving drainage, addressing sediment delivery issues, and improving fish habitat. In 2010-11, WDFW intends to complete all remaining RMAP requirements, including the improvement of approximately 18 miles of road, abandoning approximately 11 miles, and replacing or removing eight culverts. This will open another three miles of stream to fish passage.

Green Dot Road Management: Currently the Skookumchuck acquisition (including Skookumchuck and Parke Creek units) is not under the Green Dot Road Management System, and significant resource damage is occurring. Three public meetings were held in 2009 (Ellensburg, Selah, and Wenatchee) to gather public input regarding which roads are desirable for inclusion in the Green Dot System. An area of particular concern on the Quilomene WA is the Green Gate site, accessed off the Vantage Highway at milepost 13. Excessive off-road use, pioneering of new roads, weed invasion, erosion, elk disturbance, elk depredation on private lands, and habitat destruction are all significant factors in designing a road management system for this area. Many roads on the Quilomene and Whiskey Dick WAs are below standard, and those roads that can impact fish-bearing waters are of particular concern. Funding will need to be secured to address road management in the Quilomene and Whiskey Dick shrub-steppe habitat. Since the RMAP work only addresses forest roads, these areas are not covered under any existing funding plan.

Results of the 2009 Green Dot Road Management Public Meeting Process

Road Name / Proposal	Criteria/Issues	WDFW DT Comments	CAG Comments	BGMR Comments	Public Comments	
SKOOKUMCHUCK					Agree	Disagree
Gdot Jackknife Ridge Rd	Connects loop	agree	agree	agree	44	5
Gdot Skookumchuck Crossover	Connects loop	agree	agree	agree	44	3
Do not Gdot Skookumchuck Rdg	Spur road, ends at PSE	agree	agree	agree	19	23
Do not Gdot Box Canyon	Spur road, illegal off-road use	agree	disagree	disagree	19	24

PARKE CREEK

Gdot Parke Creek Rd	Connects loop outside windfarm	agree	agree	agree	33	20
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VANTAGE - green gate

ACCESS OPTIONS: non-motorized, limited motorized Gdot (perimeter or single loop), full motorized Gdot (double loop)	elk depredation vs winter range, weeds, habitat degradation, significant new road pioneering, enforcement, Disabled hunting	non-motorized	non-motorized	full motorized	14 (26%) non-motorized 10 (19%) limited motorized 29 (55%) full motorized
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Road density: WDFW staff will begin drafting a comprehensive Road Management Plan that balances natural resource protection with public access throughout the Colockum, L.T. Murray/Quilomene/Whiskey Dick, Wenas, and Oak Creek Wildlife Areas. In the past, road densities were described as linear miles of roads per square mile of habitat, but current literature supports using “visibility” or “zone of influence” as a more accurate indicator of wildlife disturbance. Although visual obstructions such as topography or tall vegetation help limit disturbance impacts in forest habitats, open shrub-steppe landscapes often require greater distances from roads to provide a similar buffering effect. With data from the on-going Colockum elk herd study, WDFW staff will study habitat needs, traffic patterns, and elk flight responses. This data will help establish a road network system that meets wildlife management objectives, yet maintains a prescribed level of public recreation access throughout WDFW lands.

LAND TRADE

The land exchange between WDFW and the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is still moving forward, and Phase I and II have been approved by both the Fish and Wildlife Commission and the DNR Lands Commissioner. On the L.T. Murray Wildlife Area there were roughly nine sections of WDFW land traded to DNR in the Taneum Drainage, and four sections of DNR land traded to WDFW in the Lower Manastash area. On the Quilomene Wildlife Area, WDFW gained roughly 11 sections. Maps of these exchanged parcels can be viewed online at the DNR website at http://www.dnr.wa.gov/Publications/amp_exc_wdfw_mapindex_3_08a.jpg

Phase I of the land exchange is expected to be finalized July 1, 2010, and Phase II finalized November 1, 2010.

GRANTS

Between 2007 and 2010 Murray staff successfully applied for numerous grants to augment the wildlife area operating budget. Wildlife Urban Interface (WUI) federal funding in the amount of \$88,400 was awarded in 2004 to the L.T. Murray Wildlife Area for assistance with the 800 acre Robinson Thinning and Habitat Improvement Project. It took over a year for WDFW and WDNR (the project administrating agency) to complete an agreement and Statement of Work to allow the project to move forward. The project was laid out, and some initial tree marking of the project was completed in 2005, but the project was delayed when the WDFW Statewide Forester was pulled off to salvage burned timber on WDFW's W.T. Wooten Wildlife Area. Roughly 30% of WUI grant funds were spent to complete tree marking in 2008, but the rest of the funds were returned due to the crash of the timber market and the subsequent lack of interest by logging contractors. WDFW did attempt to put the project out for bid, but due to market conditions no one returned bids. The project remains nearly ready for implementation, pending improvements in the timber market.

The Department of Ecology Litter Control Grant funding for the L.T. Murray (original application in 2005) was renewed for both the 2007-2009 biennium (\$3,500) and the 2009-2011 biennium (\$2,000). This funding allows for some increased emphasis on cleanup of litter illegally dumped or left behind by campers and recreationists. It has also funded the placement of dumpsters for use by elk hunters during the general elk season, our single largest influx of wildlife area users.

The L.T. Murray/Wenas Wildlife Area Multi-site Rehabilitation grant was funded in 2007. These funds were provided by the Recreation Conservation Office (RCO), in the State Lands Restoration Grant category. RCO provided \$119,539, with WDFW providing a match of \$18,258. This grant enables restoration work in the Wenas Wildlife Area's Mt. Vale and Mellergaard units, and in the Quilomene Wildlife Area's Skookumchuck Creek and Quilomene Creek units. All sites are being treated to improve native herbaceous species diversity in these shrub steppe habitat areas, some of which were formerly used for agricultural pursuits.

In 2009 wildlife area staff successfully applied for another RCO grant, and secured \$137,500 for the Parke Creek Restoration project. This project was also in the State Lands Restoration category, and WDFW provided \$8,500 in matching funds. The Parke Creek grant will restore up to 200 acres of degraded shrub steppe and riparian habitat in the Parke Creek and Little Parke Creek drainages. The project will use integrated weed management practices, including herbicide treatments, burning or mowing, and seeding with native grass and forb species. In addition, shrub cuttings and plugs will be used to improve the diversity of vegetation in select riparian areas.

Wildlife Area staff will apply for a State Lands Restoration grant in May 2010 to reestablish riparian function on sections of Whiskey Dick Creek. The project would entail planting riparian vegetation along wetted sections of Whiskey Dick Creek, roughening the streambed to prolong water retention after rain events, and improving Whiskey Dick Ridge Road to enable restoration

of Whiskey Dick Creek Road. The application process will be completed in late 2010, and successful projects will be selected in 2011.

New Issues

GRAZING

Livestock grazing is an integral part of Kittitas County culture, and in addition to protecting fish and wildlife resources, WDFW strives to support local economies. When WDFW acquired the Skookumchuck unit, agriculture constituents made clear the need for those lands to continue to support livestock grazing. The Wild Horse Coordinated Resource Management (CRM) team was created in January 2006 to facilitate resource planning across numerous ownerships. The CRM area includes roughly 62,000 acres, including nearly 35,500 acres of WDFW-owned land in the Quilomene and Whiskey Dick Wildlife Areas.

To facilitate implementation of Wild Horse CRM goals, WDFW outlined a limited livestock grazing plan. To best control livestock impacts to natural resources, the proposed grazing system includes range improvements, maintenance of forage utilization standards, use of a rotational pasture system, and utilizing adaptive management practices. Mitigation measures include:

- Excluding grazing along Skookumchuck Creek to protect fish habitat and cultural resources
- Protecting fish-bearing streams and riparian areas with temporary fencing
- Re-developing springs to distribute livestock and reduce effects to riparian areas
- Installing wildlife-friendly fencing to minimize negative impacts to wildlife
- Conducting cultural resource assessments as necessary, prior to ground disturbance
- Developing mitigation plans with Department of Archeology and Historic Preservation (DAHP) and pertinent tribes for affected archaeological sites
- Utilizing dust abatement during redevelopment of springs, as necessary

The Quilomene and Whiskey Dick Wildlife Areas were both purchased for the purpose of providing critical elk winter range and improving upland game bird habitat. Of particular importance to WDFW's grazing plan is the protection of Priority Species such as elk, sage grouse, and shrub-steppe obligate species. In September 2007 an abandoned sage-grouse nest was located on the Wild Horse Wind Power Facility, and a female was observed in the vicinity of the nest. WDFW's grazing plan was written in compliance with Greater Sage Grouse Recovery Plan recommendations to ensure livestock would not significantly impact this species.

In 2008 a limited spring grazing permit was issued for the Parke Creek area. This permit triggered a lawsuit by the Western Watershed Project, who claimed WDFW did not have sufficient documentation to forego a State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) review prior to issuing a grazing permit. In 2009, WDFW conducted a SEPA review of the entire CRM area, and also chose to develop an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to ensure the full extent of the public review process had been implemented. The Final EIS was released in November 2009, which prompted another Western Watershed Project lawsuit in January 2010. The outcome of the lawsuit is still pending. WDFW lands within the CRM area will not be grazed during 2010.

WINTER MOTORIZED VEHICLE CLOSURE

The Colockum elk herd is below population objectives, and concerns have been raised regarding the impact of human disturbance to elk on their winter range. Elk wander on and off the wildlife area in search of forage, but also appear to seek refuge on adjacent private lands in high numbers when disturbed by human activity on state lands. Elk on private lands cause damage to fences and irrigation equipment, and reduce livestock forage. In the winter of 2008, after a series of public meetings with stakeholders, local sportsmen and the Big Game Management Roundtable (BGMR), WDFW implemented a winter motorized vehicle closure on the Whiskey Dick Wildlife Area and adjacent lands. In December 2008, WDFW also initiated an extensive 3-year Colockum elk herd study to assess multiple aspects of Colockum elk herd. It is hoped that data from this study will determine if the winter range closure has been effective in providing an elk refuge area and reducing elk movement onto private lands. To coincide with the study, the winter motorized closure was extended into the winter of 2009-10, and will be reassessed in summer/fall 2010 to determine if the closure is meeting management objectives.

Major Stewardship Accomplishments

In 2008, DNR implemented the Wattley Timber Sale, a thinning project located in T18N R17E Section 18. Since this section is coming to WDFW in the land exchange, Murray staff applied grass seed to those areas where slash was burned by WDNR fire crews. Due to favorable moisture conditions the following spring, the seeding was very successful. The site now has good cover of native grasses in an area that would have been prone to noxious weed infestation.

Many of WDFW's state-wide RMAP issues were located on the L.T. Murray Wildlife Area due to private logging activities in the recent past. To address this, WDFW has improved roughly 25 miles of road, abandoned two miles, removed five problem culverts, and re-opened nearly three miles of fish habitat. By 2011, WDFW intends to complete all remaining RMAP requirements, including improving 18 miles of road, abandoning 11 miles, and improving eight culverts, which will open another three miles of fish habitat.

Status Report of 2007 Performance Measures

Key performance measures are identified each year to monitor progress and identify issues that might interfere with planned priority activities. This information will be used to delete, add, or alter priority strategies for 2010.

2007 Performance Measure	Status of Performance Measure	Explanation of Progress/ 2010 Related Activity/ Comments
Maintain 13 miles of elk fence annually	Complete annually	Repairs completed as necessary. Some sections need replacement
Feed approximately 600 tons of hay annually	Complete annually. Warm winter temperatures and low snow reduced average hay fed.	2008: 574 ton over 112 days 2009: 403 ton over 89 days 2010: 251 ton over 62 days.
Plant five acres of degraded riparian habitat to native spp.	Completed	9 acres planted
Install vehicle barriers in riparian areas to protect fish and wildlife resources	Partially completed	Lacked funding to install barrier rock, but did install approximately 100 ft of smooth wire fence
Plant 20 acres of degraded habitat to native species	Partially completed	Planted 15 acres due to timing of RMAP work and funding.
Enroll appropriate Skookumchuck roads in the Green Dot system and rehabilitate closed roads	Partially completed	Gathered public input and consulted with other agencies. DNR prefers to wait until land exchange is completed.
Continue to address road issues identified in the RMAP process	Completed scheduled work annually	Submitted 18.9 miles of roads for abandonment, removed four fish barriers, replaced one culvert, and opened 3.5 miles of stream to fish passage.
Annually treat ≥ 600 acres of upland weeds, including 30 miles of road-side weeds	Complete annually	On average, 950 acres were treated each year – including both uplands and roadsides.
Enroll the Skookumchuck unit in a fire protection contract.	Not completed	Deferred until new contract period begins in June 2010. Enroll with other WA lands.
Permanent staff annually attends fire training, first aid certification, and pesticide applicators license renewal.	Complete annually	Staff completed annual red/blue card fire training and first aid/CPR. Renewed spray licenses annually.
Repair/remove at least one mile of degraded interior fence	Completed	Staff and volunteers removed approximately 3.5 miles of fence in 2006
Complete required annual plans and reports	Completed	RMAP and PR reports completed annually, management plan and update completed in 2010.
Meet with CAG at least twice per year	Complete annually	Last meeting held March 2010.

New Strategies

The Wildlife Area Management Plan identifies strategies or activities that address the agency's goals and objectives, why the area was purchased, habitat conditions, species presence, and public issues and concerns. The following updated Strategies have been added in response to previously unaddressed or new issues or changes on the wildlife area. New strategies may also be in response to adaptive management as staff evaluate impacts of past management activities.

If the Citizens Advisory Group provided public comments on new issues, they will be identified (*in italics*) at the end of this document. Although underlined strategies have no current funding source, identifying these needs is the first step to securing additional funds.

Agency Objective: Provide sustainable fish and wildlife-related recreational and commercial opportunities compatible with maintaining healthy fish and wildlife populations and habitats. Improve the economic well-being of Washington by providing diverse, high quality recreational and commercial opportunities

1. Provide public access compatible with fish, wildlife and habitat protection
 - A. Strategy: Establish an American with Disabilities Act (ADA) hunting program for elk, deer and pheasant in the Green Gate area to promote diverse hunting opportunities on the wildlife area. Timeframe: 2010.

Agency Objective: Minimize adverse interactions between humans and wildlife.

1. **Monitor and manage public access to minimize negative effects on fish and wildlife**
 - A. Strategy: Develop a Road Management Plan that balances wildlife refuge requirements with public recreation and access needs. Timeframe: 2010

Agency Objective: Protect, restore and enhance fish, wildlife and their habitats

1. Protect, restore and enhance wetland and riparian habitats
 - A. Strategy: Pursue grant funding to implement a riparian restoration project in Whiskey Dick Creek. Timeframe: 2010-12. Funding: RCO grant.

Agency Objective: Work with tribal and local governments and private landowners to ensure fish, wildlife and habitat management objectives are achieved

1. Develop and coordinate fish, wildlife and habitat conservation projects with these groups
 - A. Strategy: Work cooperatively with Yakama Nation staff to improve riparian habitat in Taneum Creek. Remove Yahne Bridge and associated fill material, and place trees from over-stocked timber stands in the stream channel. Timeframe: 2010.

Agency Objective: Provide sound operational management of WDFW lands, facilities and access sites

1. Maintain equipment
 - A. Strategy: Pursue options to replace the 1998 Chevy truck that requires increasingly more maintenance. Timeframe: 2010.

2010 Performance Measures

Performance measures for the Murray Complex Wildlife Areas are listed below. Accomplishments and progress toward desired outcomes will be monitored and evaluated annually.

- 1) Meet with CAG to discuss management activities and address emerging issues
- 2) Maintain 13 miles of elk fence on the L.T. Murray Wildlife Area
- 3) Maintain 65 miles of boundary fence on the Quilomene and Whiskey Dick Wildlife Areas
- 4) Feed roughly 400-600 tons of hay each winter to minimize elk depredation on private land
- 5) Release 450-550 pheasants annually in the Green Gate Area
- 6) Control weed infestations on ≥ 500 acres of upland and roadside areas
- 7) Establish a regional Road Management Plan.
- 8) Enroll the Skookumchuck Unit in a fire protection agreement
- 9) Complete scheduled 2010 RMAP work with WDFW Construction staff
- 10) Complete annual RMAP reports, PR reports, and management plan updates
- 11) Implement the Parke Creek Restoration Grant: control weeds on 200 acres, establish native vegetation, and harden three Parke Creek fords to reduce sediment delivery.
- 12) Pursue grant funding to improve Whiskey Dick Creek riparian function.
- 13) Download car counter data at least once per year
- 14) Revisit grazing photo-monitoring sites on the Quilomene and Whiskey Dick Wildlife Areas

Citizens Advisory Group Input

In the past, a single “regional” Citizens Advisory Group (CAG) provided public input to the collective managers of the Colockum, Oak Creek, L.T. Murray, Wenas, Quilomene and Whiskey Dick Wildlife Areas. In 2009, individual CAGs were formed for each wildlife area, and the new L.T. Murray Complex CAG is comprised of the following individuals and their interest groups:

Murray Complex – Citizens Advisory Group Representatives

Name	Representing
Arrango, Jill	Cascade Land Conservancy
Beck, Dan	Central Washington University (Biology)
Chambers, Dave	Sky Riders Snowmobile Club
Davis, Todd	Kittitas County Noxious Weed Board
Diaz, Jennifer	Puget Sound Energy/Wild Horse Wind Farm
Essman, Bill	Kittitas Co. Field & Stream Club / Sportsman / Big Game Management Roundtable
Kruse, Robert	Businessman/Adjacent landowner/Sportsman/Conservationist
Kayser, Sam	Livestock operator / Landowner
McNamee, Ken	Department of Natural Resources
Mitchell, Jim	Ginkgo Petrified Forest State Park
Moore, Steve	Audubon Society
Nicolai, Scott	Hiker / Mountain Biker / Conservationist / Yakama Nation

Ridlon, Jason	Back Country Horsemen - Alpine Lakes Chapter
Wilson, Bill	Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation

A Citizen's Advisory Group meeting was held March 30, 2010, and was attended by the following members and WDFW staff: Jennifer Diaz; Jason Ridlon; Bill Wilson; Sam Kayser; Ken McNamee; Marc Eylar; Scott Nicolai; Bill Essman, Manager Shana Winegeart; Assistant Mgr. Wayne Hunt; Assistant District Biologist Will Moore; WDFW Enforcement Officer Steve Rogers.

The following new input/issues were discussed at the CAG meeting:

Issue: Other than paying for the new manager's position, how is the rest of the Wild Horse Wind Farm funding being spent?

Response: Regional Manager Jeff Tayer requested an accounting of past spending on the wind farm account from Olympia. To date, the majority of funds have been spent on staff salaries and wages. Wildlife area staff recently purchased a new equipment trailer and two ATVs with these funds to accommodate increased workload associated with two restoration projects.

CAG Top 10 Unfunded Priority Projects

1. Regain more of the Wild Horse Wind Power funds generated on the Whiskey Dick WA that was originally slated to fund Whiskey Dick projects, staffing, and O&M
2. Increase Enforcement Staff
3. Increase Wildlife Area Staff
4. Weed control
5. Road Maintenance
6. Forest Health Improvement
7. Eastern pasture spring work (for grazing in Rocky Coulee, etc.)
8. Fund a livestock rider to keep cattle dispersed and help lessen fencing needs
9. Elk Fence replacement and maintenance
10. Public education and outreach (including signage, pamphlets, noxious weed identification, road management information, etc.)
11. Fencing supplies for grazing program

Contacts:

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Want to see the full plan?

Go to –

[http://wdfw.wa.gov/lands/wildlife_areas/
management_plans/](http://wdfw.wa.gov/lands/wildlife_areas/management_plans/)